


Rhode Island Department of Human Services  
Office of Rehabilitation Services  
and the  
State Rehabilitation Council

2013 Annual Report

*Lincoln D. Chafee*  
Governor

*Sandra M. Powell*  
Director



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**Message from the Director  
Sandra M. Powell**



It is my pleasure to provide you with the Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2013 for the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS). ORS is charged with empowering Rhode Islanders with disabilities who voluntarily wish to obtain and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and full integration into society. Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI); and Disability Determination Services (DDS) provide a myriad of resources and services which enhance the quality of life for Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

Younger individuals with disabilities and their families work with vocational rehabilitation counselors in order to make that important transition from school to post-secondary education and careers. The business and labor community depend on ORS for trained, job-ready applicants.

Rhode Islanders applying for social security disability benefits get accurate and timely decisions, and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides services for individuals who have a visual impairment. ORS provides a comprehensive array of personalized services to Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

In FFY2013 6,489 persons with disabilities were provided vocational rehabilitation, training and employment services. The Disability Determination Services adjudicated 17,233 claims for social security disability benefits.

We are proud of the partnerships that our staff has developed with our citizen advisory councils, our customers and the community, which has contributed so much to the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island.

*Sandra A. Powell*

On behalf of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, I am pleased to present to you the 2013 Annual Report. The mission of the Office of Rehabilitation Services is to provide customized and comprehensive services to individuals with disabilities that will maximize their quality of life, self-reliance, and economic independence in the community.



We have included success stories that reflect the diversity of our customers and their needs. We want to illustrate the partnership between our staff and our customers that makes rehabilitation work.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program increases revenue at all levels of government and decreases the burden of income maintenance programs. As persons with disabilities achieve an employment outcome, they become tax-paying citizens and more than pay back the cost of the program.

We also would like to extend our fondest wishes to former Associate Director Stephen Brunero in his new endeavors. Steve retired in October after 36 years of dedicated service to the State of Rhode Island. It is my honor and privilege to now lead the department to achieve our mission.

*Ronald Racine*

# Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett



The Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council is proud to share this 2013 Annual Report. It has been an active year for the Council as we continue to work closely with the Office of Rehabilitation Services to ensure Rhode Islanders with disabilities obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment. The Council has continued to organize its work through strategic plans in collaboration with the Agency.

The State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee continued to support the connection between data collection results for the customers of the Agency and plans to move the Agency forward with a focus on continuous quality improvement. In addition, the Committee provided annual feedback and public testimony regarding the proposed State Plan.

The Transition Committee had a busy year setting primary goals to advise and assist the Agency in youth transitions to employment. The Committee will focus on increasing presence at transition related events; advise and assist in the development of outreach strategies targeted for transition age youth that qualify for 504 plans; and assist in identifying employment barriers and challenges for transition-aged youth.

The Nominating and Leadership Development Committee continued their successful efforts to ward ongoing and active recruitment of qualified individuals to the Council membership. The Committee identified new members who represent the interests of the Stakeholders and can enhance the Council with increased knowledge and skills.

The Outreach Committee continued their focus on identifying strategies to increase public awareness and employment partnerships with underserved communities in the State.

The Executive Committee met with ORS leadership on a regular basis to provide assistance and guidance in meeting the goals and mission of the agency.

It has been a privilege to serve as Chair of the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council. The Council is proud of the commitment and outstanding work of the ORS leadership team to provide consistent and quality services to Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

The State Rehabilitation Council shares an open invitation to join us for a Council meeting. The meetings are open to the public and information on the Council can be found on the Office of Rehabilitation Services website.

*Kate McCarthy Barnett*

Dr. Kate McCarthy Barnett: Chair  
Jeffrey D. Machado: Vice-Chair  
Catherine Sansonetti, Esq: Secretary  
Corey J. Allard  
Janice A. Belasco  
Bryant Berganza  
Christine Botts  
Rocco Bruno  
Thomas Clemons  
Kelley Conti  
Cynthia M. Cote  
Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor  
Dr. Judith Drew  
Joan Fino  
Dorothy Furlong  
Jeanne M. Giroux  
Paul Harden  
Michael Hazard  
Margaret Hoye  
Roger Andrew Iannetta  
Diana B. Kriner  
Anne LeClerc  
Aracelis Maria  
Doreen D. McConaghy  
Daniel C. Pieroni  
Vincent Rossi  
Jane Slade  
Juan Troncoso  
Willa Truelove  
Herb Weiss  
Kim Wennermark  
Nancy Baker: Facilitator

## **Nominating and Leadership**

This Committee is responsible for leadership development and the recruitment of people who are committed to our mission to work with the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) to assure that all disabled Rhode Islanders are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.

- (1) Continuing the mission of the State Rehabilitation Council, the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee sustained its efforts toward ongoing and active recruitment of qualified individuals to its membership. The Committee routinely endeavors to solicit members who will enrich the partnership with The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), represent the interests of the Stakeholders, grow the skill set of the Council through information sharing and educational presentations, as well as diversify the composition of the group so as to reflect the needs of the populations served, while also meeting the Federal requirements.
  - We are happy to report eight members were submitted for reappointment and six new members were recruited to the Council in 2013, representing a broad range of stakeholders across the State of Rhode Island, including persons with disabilities.
  - Recruitment strategies into the 2014 year:  
The Nominating and Leadership Development Committee is committed to member recruitment and will work to broaden the Council's efforts specially to solicit membership of under-represented populations and businesses around the State of Rhode Island. We will establish full council recruitment policies to broaden the candidate pool.

- (2) Additionally, we plan to broaden our scope of training and leadership development in 2014.

Goal: In the coming year we wish to transition this committee's work into a more concentrated training effort. We plan to establish in partnership with The Office of Rehabilitation Services, utilizing resources from the National Committee of State Rehabilitation Councils and the Rehabilitation Services Administration, a refined logistical training program for our membership. We will be working with our Facilitator over the next months and hope to have a completed framework ready for the fall of 2014.

Strategies for training and leadership development:

- Establish an agenda, protocols and speakers for a half-day training event in the fall of each year to be done in partnership with ORS.
- Outline and present to Executive Leadership, for their review, a training manual that will be given to all new members.
- Establish Facilitator protocol for transitioning new members onto the Council's Committees and disseminating training materials.
- Establish a mentoring program for new members.

Committee Members include the following individuals: Christina Battista, Rocco Bruno, Cynthia M. Cote, and Dominic DiOrio (Chair), Laurie DiOrio (SBVI Liaison), Elizabeth Graves (SILC Liaison), Paul Harden, Margaret Hoye, and Jack Ringland.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Dominic DiOrio, Chair*



# Outreach

The Outreach Committee is charged with educating the public and communicating the ORS mission. The committee reviews agency marketing and outreach materials and supports the development of the Annual Report. It strives to create and utilize partnerships that will impact the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities and informs policy makers about the financial benefits of investment in vocational rehabilitation.

The objectives of the Outreach Committee for 2013 and 2014 are to increase awareness and communicate the mission of the Office of Rehabilitation Services to a broader constituency, starting in particular with two of the most underserved groups:

- Non-English speaking populations
- Multicultural populations

## **Strategies for broadening constituency:**

- We are looking to add new businesses, non-profits and agencies that could assist the Outreach Committee and the community in increasing awareness to these populations of the existence and the benefits of working with ORS.
- The Committee will develop a marketing plan and a methodology on how to best outreach to these targeted populations. To this end, the committee will organize a focus group of stakeholders within these targeted populations to brainstorm the best ways to reach the maximum number of potential consumers.

## **Resource goals for 2014:**

- The Committee would like to put together a budget so that once we have identified the best venues to reach these underserved population groups, we will have the resources to best communicate that message, whether it be by print media, bus signage, etc.

Committee Members include the following individuals: Corey J. Allard, Bryant Berganza, Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor, Roberta Greene-Whittemore (ORS Liaison), Michael Hazard, Dorothy Furlong, Jeffrey Machado (Co-chair), Aracelis Maria, Ronald Racine (SBVI Liaison), Vincent Rossi, Juan Troncoso (Co-chair), Willa Truelove, & Kim Wennermark.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Jeffrey D. Machado, Co-chair*



## *In Memorium*

Jeanne M. Giroux was on the Transition Committee and represented current and former applicants for, or recipients of, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and individuals with a disability who may have difficulty representing them. She had been on the SRC for two full terms and had just started a third.

Recently we lost Jeanne to illness; her absence is haunting for our Council and has left a wound still open. It is hard when family leaves us. We catch ourselves glancing out of the corner of our eye, seeking her personal and effortless smile. We hear her laughter, compassion, understanding and resolve, echoing so familiarly in our memories.

Jeanne was a tireless advocate for people with disabilities. Often we hear those words and wonder to what extent did this person's arms hold those in need; did their heart beat with compassion and understanding, did their fortitude fight the difficult battles for those who could not do so themselves; did they walk the walk? Jeanne did all those things and more, she offered to those who listened a personal example of what it is like to struggle with a disability but never let it stop you. Jeanne was always searching for ways to help others no matter how challenging the road she traveled became. She was a genuinely caring individual; dedication to humanity. We are ever thankful to have been able to know her and this Council moves forward with our purpose renewed by thoughts of Jeanne.

“People do not die for us immediately, but remain bathed in a sort of aura of life which bears no relation to true immortality but through which they continue to occupy our thoughts in the same way as when they were alive. It is as though they were traveling abroad.” ~ *Marcel Proust* ~

# State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance

The State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is charged with advising the agency about its plans and policies in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act. The committee also participates in reviewing with ORS the quality of services delivered to ORS customers and insuring continuous quality improvement.

In 2013, the SRC again provided annual feedback and public testimony regarding the ORS draft FFY2014 proposed State Plan. Last year, in the annual report, the committee reported past involvement with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) ORS site review. This review, known as the 107 Monitoring site review, is conducted approximately once every five years.

- In response to issues noted by RSA through that review, ORS significantly revamped the state plan to help consumers prepare for more quality competitive employment outcomes measured in terms of hours, wages, and benefits. We commented then that the SRC strongly supports the agency's effort to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce in a meaningful way.

This year we encouraged ORS to take a leadership role in supported employment, and we expressed our enthusiasm for the new ORS fee structure to incentivize supported employment providers to move toward more competitive and integrated employment for people with developmental disabilities. We also generally reminded ORS that we share with RSA the spirit of the law...that people with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to earn a living wage, to have medical and other job benefits, and to be in integrated and competitive employment consistent with informed choice...and to enjoy an array of services and supports to help them to achieve those ends.

In addition to State Plan work, the committee comments on proposed ORS policies. This year, there were no additional policies for review.

We also work with ORS on continuous quality improvement and look forward to continued participation in reviewing the Comprehensive Needs Assessment to assess customer satisfaction. This year, we will have the opportunity to meet with ORS staff to learn more about the results of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment to see where ORS has satisfied customers and what areas of improvement were noted.

Committee Members include the following individuals: Thomas Clemons, Kelley Conti, Linda Deschenes (ORS Liaison), Kathleen Grygiel (ORS Liaison), Gail Lawson, Kate McCarthy-Barnett (Co-chair), Jessica Mowry, Catherine Sansonetti (Co-chair).

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Catherine Sansonetti & Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Co-chairs*

## 2013 SRC Annual Meeting



Front: Grace Pires, Janice Belasco, Jeff Machado, Catherine Sansonetti, Christina Battista, Cynthia Cote, Jack Ringland  
Middle: Peggy Benz, K. Grygiel, A. LeClerc, J. Nannig, Gail Lawson, Nicole McCarty, Marilyn Walaska, Joan Fino, L. Graves, Roger Ianetta  
Back: Laurie Diorio, MaryEllen Hagarty, ?, Sharon Morra, Kim Wennermark, Steve Brunero, Ron Racine, Vin Rossi, Linda Deschenes, Christine Botts, Rocco Bruno, Juan Troncoso, Paul Harden, Willa Truelove and Nancy Baker.

# Transition

The Transition Committee is charged with advising and assisting the Office of Rehabilitation Services in: increasing the knowledge and awareness of transition related events/resources; development of targeted outreach to particular youth (i.e. students on 504 plans); and identifying potential barriers and challenges that youth in transition encounter. This charge supports the ORS mission to improve opportunities for youth to make successful transition to employment. The Transition Committee has begun its work on the goals that were established and finalized in March 2013.

The Transition Committee set forth the following three goals to advise and assist ORS in the area of Transition:

- (1) Increase the presence of ORS at state, regional and local transition related events for students with disabilities, families and professionals. Strategies to address this goal are ongoing and have included: requesting from the State Transition Council a list of state, regional and local events that support students, families and professionals that ORS Counselors can share with consumers; ORS Counselors seeking information from the individual school districts they work with that may be hosting transition events and making themselves available to provide information/presentations.
  
- (2) Advise and assist ORS in developing outreach strategies targeted for transition age youth (18-24) that qualify for 504 plans. Strategies to address this goal are ongoing and have included: determine and develop a list of current 504 district coordinators throughout the state; review of present ORS materials and determination that a specific marketing “card” for youth emphasizing employment may be beneficial; potential high traffic areas have been identified (guidance office, libraries, community, adult education centers); and 504 session held for students and families held at the annual College Forum.

(3) Assist ORS in identifying barriers and challenges for transition-aged youth in order to strategize effective interventions. Strategies to address this goal are ongoing and have included: The identification of subgroups of youth that seem to lack information on ORS and/or transition information; the identification of particular barriers such as access/location of One Stop Centers; edits to marketing materials to engage youth more effectively; talking points for counselors to better establish a consistent and clear description of ORS services; subcommittee reports to ORS regarding feedback from the field, consumers and families as it relates to perceived barriers for transition-aged youth and employment; and questions regarding ORS services have been added to RIDE's Transition Outcome Survey.

Committee Members include the following individuals: Christine Botts, Lea Colardo (Co-chair), Dr. Judith Drew, Joan Fino, Jeanne Giroux, Maryellen Hagerty, Paul Harden, Roger Andrew Iannetta, Diana Kriner, Doreen McConaghy, JoAnn Nannig (ORS Liaison), Dan Pieroni, and Jane Slade (co-chair).

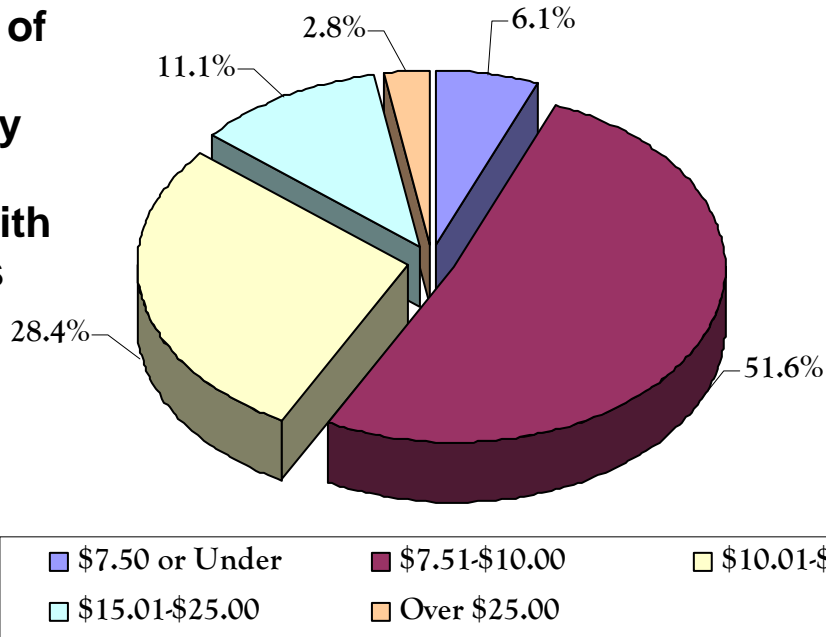
*Respectfully Submitted:  
Jane Slade, Co-chair*

### **New SRC Members**

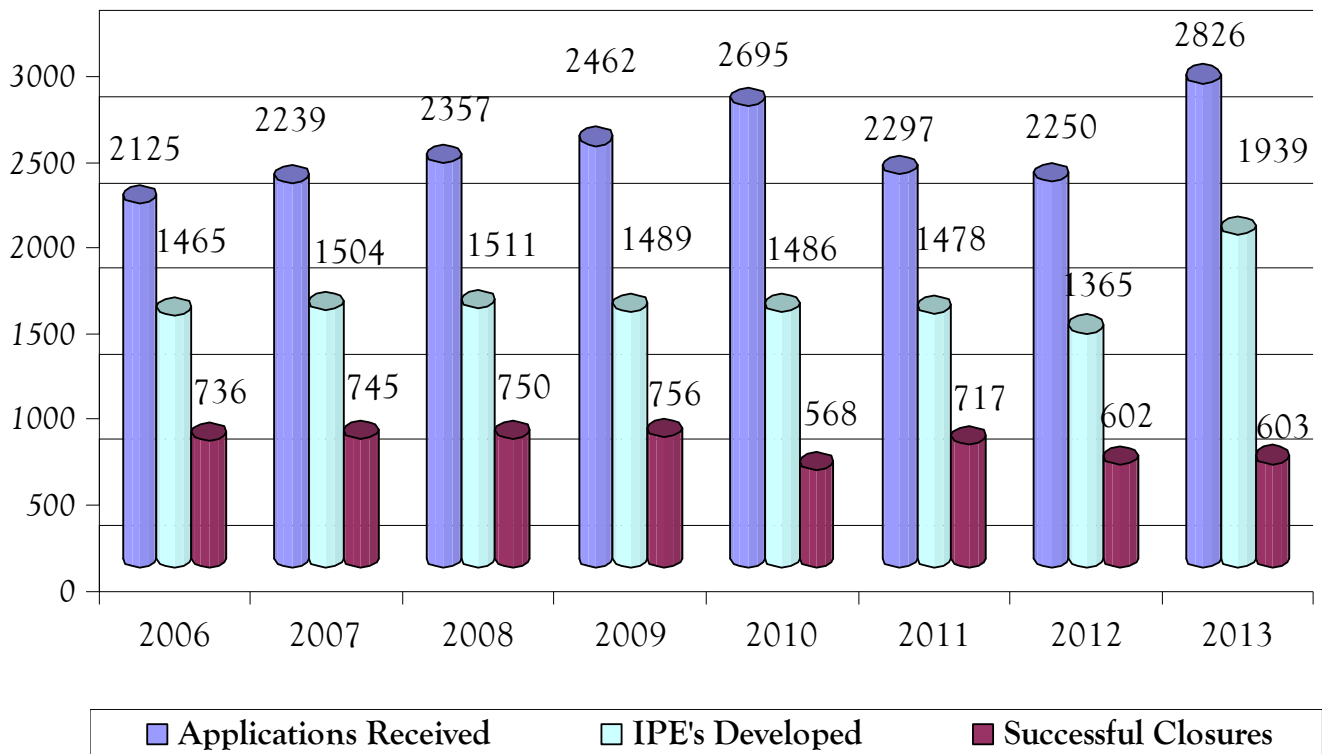


*Nicole McCarty, Gail Lawson, Marilyn Walaska, Peggy Benz, Christina Battista, Jack Ringland*

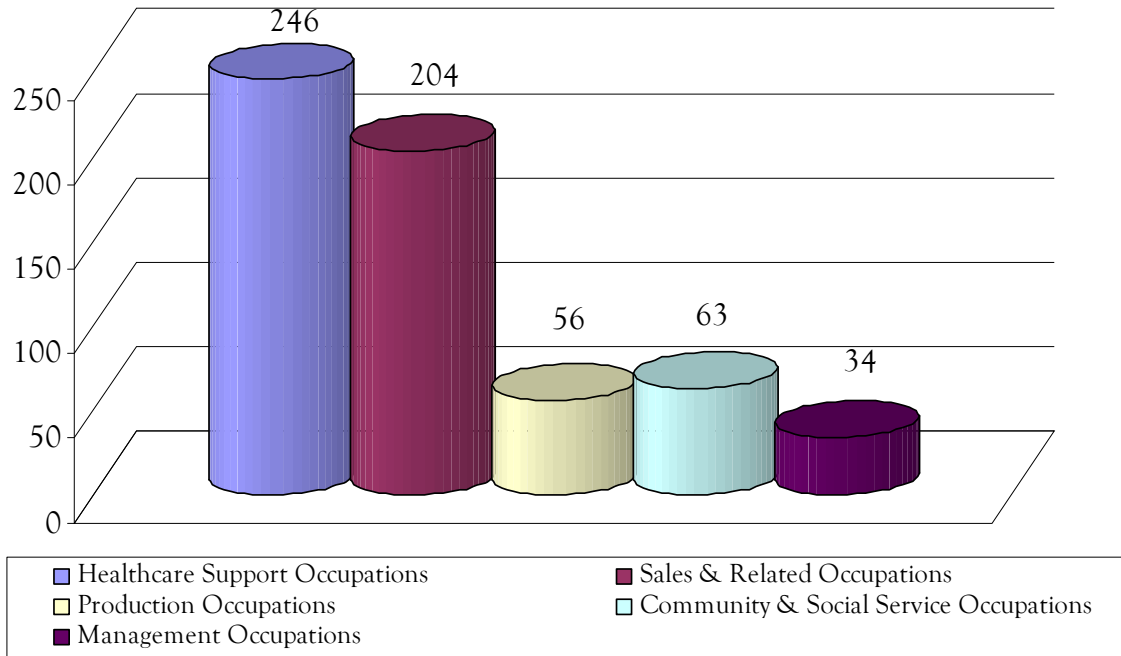
**Hourly Wage of  
603  
Successfully  
Employed  
Individuals with  
Disabilities**



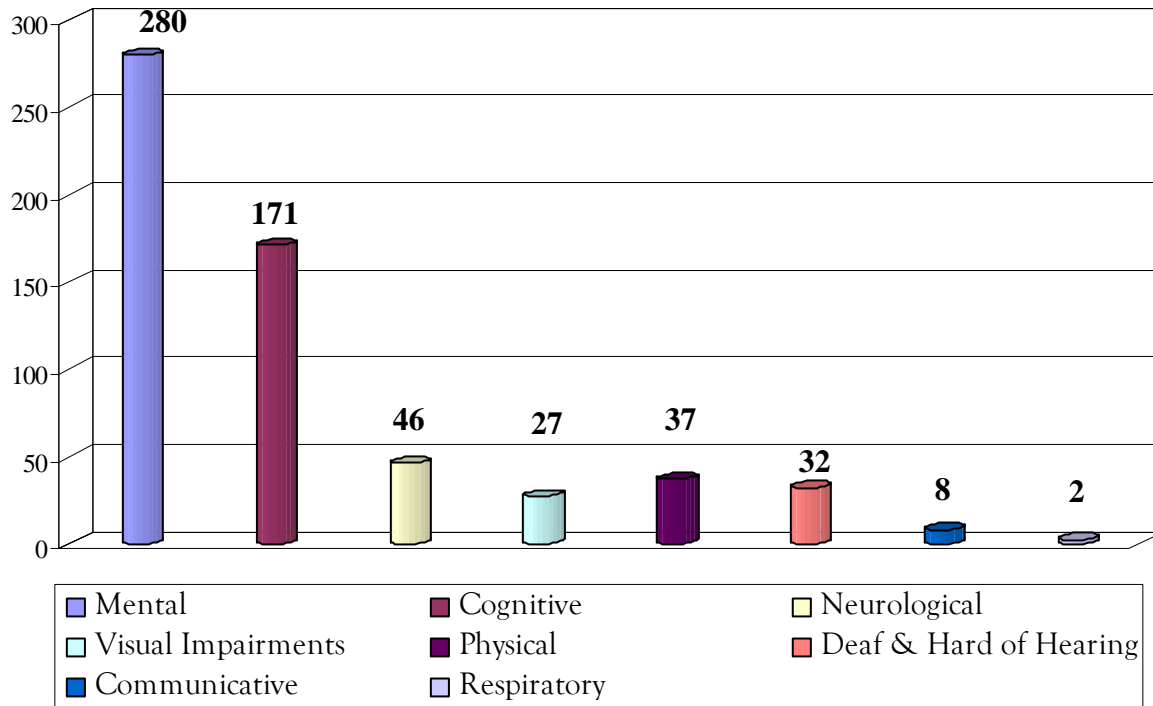
**2006-2013 Statistical Comparisons**



## Primary Occupation of 603 Persons Successfully Employed



## Primary Disability of 603 Persons Successfully Employed





## **Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

### **603 individuals were successfully employed**

<b>2,826</b>	individuals applied for vocational rehabilitation services.
<b>6,489</b>	individuals with disabilities were provided vocational rehabilitation services.
<b>1,939</b>	individuals worked with a vocational rehabilitation counselor to develop a new Individualized Plan for Employment [IPE].
<b>3,299</b>	individuals received Counseling and Guidance Services from vocational rehabilitation counselors.
<b>3,986</b>	individuals received services purchased from vendors. Services ranged from evaluations, medical and psychological therapies, training, personal assistant services, job placement and training.
<b>249</b>	individuals received rehabilitation technology services to assist them to prepare for and to enter employment.
<b>16,506</b>	individuals received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology and funding options.
<b>3,038</b>	individuals received AT training, demonstration, loans or assistance with recycled AT devices.
<b>455</b>	individuals were provided specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program.
<b>2,017</b>	youth with disabilities ages 14-24 received transition services provided by 20 VR counselors.

## Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired

- 14** vending facilities were supported by the Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. BEP sales totaled approximately \$1.24 million. Two locations were temporarily closed and four had renovations completed.
- 466** individuals were registered for NEWSLINE , a newspaper reading service of which 12 recently signed up.
- 468** elderly individuals who are blind or visually impaired received services from the Independent Living for Older Blind Program. Services included: **312** low vision aids, **162** rehab teaching appointments, **51** mobility services, and **120** service coordinations.
- 84%** of this group reported that they feel more confident in their independent living after receiving services, and **37.6%** indicated they had considered nursing home placement prior to services, but were able to remain in their own homes.

## Disability Determination Services

- 17,484** total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services.
- 17,233** claims were successfully processed by the Disability Determination Services.
- 10,996** initial claims were filed.
- 1,603** Continuing Disabilities Review cases completed.
- 279** Pre-Hearing Cases processed, resulting in **237** Disability Hearing Unit decisions.
- 7,220** cases with Consultative Examinations purchased.
- 13,799** cases with Medical Evidence of Record purchased.
- \$2,029,639** Total Medical Costs with a Total Budget of \$8,297,497.
- \$494.51** cost per case.

Production Per Work Year (PPWY) efficiency rate was **375.8**. The national rate was **322.0**. The performance accuracy rate for RI was **95.4%**. The net accuracy was **97.6%**. The regulatory standard is **90.4%**.

\*Based on the Monthly Obligation Report for 9/2013.

The Vocational Rehabilitation process consists of assisting an individual with a disability to assess his/her vocational abilities and to identify, coordinate and provide services needed to realize employment. The partnership between each individual with a disability and their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is a key component in the Vocational Rehabilitation process. The individual and his/her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor work together to develop an Employment Plan which will assist that individual to reach his/her employment goal. Vocational Rehabilitation services that may be incorporated in an Employment Plan may include:

- Counseling and Guidance to help plan vocational goals and services
- Transition Services from School to Career
- Rehabilitation Technology Services
- Assistive Technology Services
- Diagnostic Evaluations
- College or Vocational Training
- Job Development and Placement Services
- Vehicle Modifications
- Housing Modifications
- Post-Employment Services
- Other Goods and Services
- Job Training and Job Supports

## Deaf Services...

The Office of Rehabilitation Services helps individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing obtain services to meet their needs, provides counseling and guidance to help plan vocational goals and services, and assists the individual to obtain employment. They serve as a resource to professionals, state agencies, community organizations, and the public providing information related to employment, training, and accommodations for persons who have a hearing loss.

## Independent Living Services...

The Office of Rehabilitation Services purchases assessments and independent living services from the two Independent Living Centers, PARI Independent Living Center and Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL), as part of preparing individuals with significant disabilities for employment.

## The Rhode Island Learning Disabilities Project ...

The LD Project is a unique Department of Human Services intra-agency initiative between the Office of Rehabilitation Services and the RI Works program. This collaborative relationship was created to help identify parents on cash assistance with learning disabilities, and to provide the necessary accommodations and vocational training programs in order for those individuals to become independent and economically self-sufficient. During 2013, the LD Project served **303** individuals and assisted **82** individuals with learning disabilities in reaching their employment goals.

## Supported Employment...

Supported employment assists individuals with the most significant disabilities who need ongoing supports to choose, find, and keep competitive employment in community-integrated settings. After initial services by ORS, long-term funding is provided through other sources.

## Transition...

The Office of Rehabilitation Services has a strong commitment to assisting students with disabilities in transition planning to adult life. ORS counselors assist all school districts, students with disabilities, and their families to plan services to help students reach career goals. ORS counselors provide technical assistance and information to school systems and work in partnership with school transition staff, 5 Regional Educational Collaboratives, and 4 Transition Academies to improve transition planning.

## **Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan (ATEL) Program...**

The ATEL Program loans telephone equipment to residents of the State of Rhode Island who have hearing, speech, or neuro-muscular (unable to dial or hold a receiver) impairments and have a signed certificate of disability. Equipment is issued on a first-come, first-serve basis.

## **Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services is the lead agency for the Rhode Island Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP). ATAP is a statewide program funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, which works to reduce or eliminate barriers that impede access to, and funding for, assistive technology devices and services for individuals with disabilities of all ages.

## **Home Modification Program...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services administers federal and state independent living funds which provide home accessibility and adaptive equipment for individuals who are significantly disabled, to enable them to meet independent living goals in their homes and communities.

## **State PCA Program...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services contracts with PARI Independent Living Center to be the fiscal agent for the State Personal Care Assistance program for individuals who are not eligible for Medicaid-funded waivers. Through this program individuals are able to continue living in the community rather than in a nursing home.

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) offers a wide array of services to eligible individuals who are blind or visually impaired through its Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Business Enterprises Program, and Social Services Program. The various services offered by these programs are designed to help individuals of all ages achieve independence at home, in the community, and in the workplace.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Program...**

A Federal/State Program created to assist people who are blind or visually impaired to obtain or maintain employment. Services provided include evaluation, orientation, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, guidance and counseling, career assessment, educational planning, vocational training, provision of adaptive equipment, job development, placement, and follow-up services.

### **Business Enterprises Program...**

A Federal/State Program which establishes vending facilities in state, federal or private buildings for operation by persons who are legally blind. Licensed blind vendors operate vending facilities at 14 locations throughout the state and are assigned to these locations on the basis of their seniority within the program. Types of facilities range from small snack bars serving light snacks and beverages to larger food-service sites serving hot and cold entrees prepared on-site. All operate under the name of "Coffee Plus".

### **Newsline...**

A comprehensive newspaper reading service available to individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or print handicapped, that is accessible through the use of any touch-tone telephone. Individuals can access more than 200 newspapers and magazines, including The Providence Journal, The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, and the AARP Monthly Newsletter.

## Social Services Program...

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from birth through age 14, elderly individuals, and individuals for whom a vocational goal is not feasible.

- **Children's Case Management Services** include family casework, coordination with Early Intervention Programs, educational guidance, summer camp for youth, arrangement of ophthalmological and low vision evaluations, and information and referral to appropriate community programs.
- **Independent Living for Older Blind Program** provides case management services, along with ancillary services for mobility and orientation, rehabilitation teaching for skills training in activities of daily living, management of low vision, provisions of adaptive equipment, and information and referral to support groups and appropriate community services.

Disability Determination Services (DDS) is the unit within the Office of Rehabilitation Services that determines the medical eligibility of Rhode Island residents (both children and adults) who have applied for benefits under the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) programs. The DDS, although fully funded by the Federal Social Security Administration (SSA), is a state agency responsible for obtaining the medical records and other information needed to determine whether the applicant meets the criteria for disability, as defined by the SSA rules and regulations.

Over the past 8 years, the Rhode Island DDS (RIDDS), as a part of the national SSA initiative, has transformed itself from a paper-based institution to a fully electronic record-keeping system. With the inclusion of Continuing Disability Reviews (CDR's) into the electronic process in early FY 2009, the DDS gained the capacity to process over 98% of its current workload electronically. Using national scanning contractors, in-house casual processing, and a system of inbound and outbound faxing, the images of all medical records are now stored in an electronic case folder. This allows multiple individuals to be working with a case record simultaneously and for exchange of case information with experts nationwide throughout the Social Security disability network.

The RIDDS continues to play an important role in determining the design of the adjudicative model for the Social Security Disability Program. This is accomplished by testing, evaluating, and incorporating the innovations which make the system more user-friendly and navigable for the disability applicant. The RIDDS is becoming more involved with the development of a new Disability Case Processing System, which is currently being piloted in Idaho, Illinois, and Missouri. This legacy data tool will standardize the information technology and maintenance of all the DDS's nationwide, and eventually tie in with all other operatives within the Social Security Administration disability adjudication program.



In FY 2013, the RIDDS achieved measures of accuracy and productivity which ranked in the top 10% in the nation, while processing over 17,000 disability applications for residents of Rhode Island. The number of individuals seeking disability determinations has increased dramatically over the past few years, both in Rhode Island and nationwide. The Baby Boomer generation aging into its most disability prone years, coupled with the widespread economic downturn, have contributed greatly to the heightened number of applications. The RIDDS, with a diminished staff, has struggled to keep pace with its workload. The by-product, unfortunately, has been a progressively longer wait for disabled Rhode Islanders to receive information as to the outcome of their disability applications. The case processing time in Rhode Island is among the longest in the country, approaching double the national average. Nonetheless, the dedicated and responsive staff at the RIDDS continues to maximize all of their available resources to provide quality service to the citizens of Rhode Island.

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## **Local Social Security Field Offices**

380 Westminster Mall, Room 318  
Providence, RI 02903  
1-877-402-0808

30 Quaker Lane, 1st Floor  
Warwick, RI 02886-0111  
1-866-964-2038

4 Pleasant Street  
Pawtucket, RI 02860  
1-866-931-7079

Pavilion Plaza  
2168 Diamond Hill Road  
Woonsocket, RI 02895  
1-877-229-3542

130 Bellevue Avenue  
Newport, RI 02840  
1-866-253-5607

2 Shaws Cove, Room 203  
New London, CT 06320  
1-866-643-3401

***“As reported, ORS assisted 603 individuals to obtain employment in jobs that were consistent with their goals and aspirations. ORS would like to showcase some individuals who exemplify the benefits of employment.”***

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**Client: Paul Salas**  
**Occupation: Janitor**  
**Employer: U.S. Naval Base**  
**Counselor: Meredith Wright**

Paul applied to ORS at the recommendation of his case manager at Middletown High School. At the time, Paul was working in the family business, but needed extra support to find employment outside of the food service industry as he transitioned from high school.

After completing a vocational evaluation and summer work while in high school, Paul was connected to the transition program at Resources for Human Development (RHD) in Pawtucket. While there, Paul obtained his driver's permit and went on to secure a license. He also took advantage of work skill development opportunities while exploring a variety of employment possibilities.

Despite his developmental disability, Paul was denied Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Division of Developmental Disability (DDD) funding after he graduated from high school. During his transition, Paul worked for a while at a local Walmart.

Looking for new options, Paul received job development services from the team at RHD. He successfully applied for a five-day-per-week position at the naval base in Newport, where he travels to and from work in his own vehicle. Paul currently enjoys his new position, which includes both opportunities for wage advancement and medical benefits.

**Client:** Richard Anthony  
**Occupation:** CNC Lathe Operator  
**Employer:** MCM Technologies  
**Counselor:** Kathleen Neun

At 57, Richard Anthony had worked for most of his life as a machinist and lathe operator at a variety of facilities around Rhode Island. However, following a health crisis, Richard found himself laid off and struggling to regain employment. Richard turned to his local netWORKri for assistance finding work, and was referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services for training and placement.

At his vocational evaluation, Richard demonstrated enthusiasm and initiative. He decided he would be happiest returning to his work as a machinist, and began exploring his options for retraining and certification. The biggest barrier to returning to work was the new technology. The latest lathe machines require specific computer skills for programming and operation.

To complete his transition back to the workforce, ORS referred Richard for job development, placement, and retention services through Career Construction. Richard's valuable skill set made him the ideal candidate for a position, and he was soon hired as a machinist at MCM Technologies.

He is currently employed-full time, and is enjoying his work as a CNC lathe operator.

**Client:** Maribel Carrasco  
**Occupation:** Substitute Teacher's Assistant  
**Employer:** Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center  
**Counselor:** Teresa Scaramuzzo-DiMattia

Maribel was referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services during her senior year at Juanita Sanchez High School, in January of 2011. Maribel had challenges with concentrating, and she sometimes struggled to communicate with those around her. To ensure a successful transition out of high school and into the workforce, Maribel's counselor at ORS referred her to the extension program at the Providence Transition Academy.

At the Transition Academy, a unique program providing youth with an additional year of career training through local internships, Maribel quickly gained confidence in her abilities. She had the opportunity to explore possibilities as a C.N.A. and office assistant before discovering her passion for teaching at the Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center, where she enjoyed working with the children under her care. Even while recovering from surgery, Maribel remained committed to securing a career, and enjoyed speaking on panels hosted by the Transition Academy.

While completing her internship, Maribel received guidance and counseling at ORS, along with vocational evaluation services and a bus pass while she studied for her driver's permit. Maribel impressed the staff at Beautiful Beginnings so much that they offered her a job immediately. As she transitioned to a thirty-hours-per-week position as a Teacher's Assistant, Maribel benefited from additional On-the-Job-Training services provided through ORS.

Maribel is currently employed at Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Centers, and plans to continue her education in order to become a classroom teacher.

**Client:** Corey Tellier  
**Occupation:** Stock/Carriages  
**Employer:** BJ's Wholesale Club  
**Counselor :** Paula Cardin Berard

During his junior year at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, Corey Tellier connected with the staff at ORS to help him secure a job after graduating. He was eager to join the workforce, hoping to find work at BJ's like other members of his family. After meeting with his counselor, Corey began to apply himself at school in earnest, doing all he could to make a successful transition.

One of the biggest barriers to employment for Corey was his difficulty using sign language. Corey was born with a shortened forearm, which makes him reliant on his left hand for all of his signing. This could make communication exhausting for him, and finding skilled interpreters was a persistent challenge. These daily frustrations began to ease as Corey explored his career options and found himself gaining skills and connections during his transition year in the co-op program at the School for the Deaf. His mentors helped set him up with iPhone apps to assist with signing and translation, along with a volume meter which helped Corey develop a newfound self-awareness. To help improve his signing ability, his counselor purchased a specialized ASL picture dictionary. Corey was also connected with capable interpreters who helped him communicate his needs with his peers and supervisors.

Corey moved on to a year at the Transition Academy in Coventry, where he focused on building job skills while working at a local restaurant. As time went by, Corey's confidence truly began to shine. He had a chance to put his new skills into action when an opportunity to begin working at BJ's finally arrived. In addition to impressing his supervisors with his dedication, he found himself making new friends there to spend time with outside of work.

While at the Academy, Corey studied to take his driving test and obtain a license. Shedding his initial shyness, Corey stepped up to take a leadership role in the classroom. By the end of the year, his interpreter had developed a unique driver's education program for the students at the School for the Deaf - and Corey helped her teach the new class!

Corey's assistive technology interested his co-workers at BJ's, who grew curious about sign language. He worked with them to develop a system of non-verbal communication they could use while on the job, and one of his peers made him a small pin he could wear while collecting carriages to inform customers about his disability. Corey soon found himself approached by other deaf individuals who were eager to sign with him. After finishing his transition year, both the restaurant and BJ's offered Corey a permanent position. He was proud to take the job he'd always wanted.

Corey successfully completed his driving test and just purchased his first truck. He is still employed at BJ's. His counselor is proud of all the positive changes she has seen during the years they worked together.

**Client:** Melody Adams  
**Occupation:** Sandwich Maker  
**Employer:** Au Bon Pain  
**Counselor:** Sheila Moffat

Melody was referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services through a local career center after facing employment challenges due to knee and back pain. She could not perform the duties of a kitchen manager which she had done for the last five years.

Working with her counselor, Melody received a variety of services to help her obtain employment. ORS provided a clothing allowance so that Melody would have professional clothing while interviewing and when on the job, and arranged for a bus pass to make it easier for her to travel around the area. Through ORS, Melody was also able to update her immunizations and participate in a vocational evaluation at Goodwill Industries.

Melody scored high in the Social, Enterprising, and Artistic areas of the evaluation, and her counselor appreciated her motivation and work ethic. At Goodwill, Melody encouraged and advised several of the younger attendants with the tasks they had difficulty with.

Melody was ready to get back to work. Job placement services helped her secure a permanent, full-time position at Au Bon Pain, where natural supports allow her to sit and rest as needed as she completes her tasks.

**Client:** Nowelle Grill  
**Occupation:** Patient Care Coordinator  
**Counselor:** Teresa O'Brien

Nowelle applied for ORS in September 2011 while she was working full time in the restaurant industry. Nowelle had been in the food industry for over 30 years, but due to rheumatoid arthritis, she needed to leave the physically demanding position and find a new career. When Nowelle met with her counselor for the first time, she was nervous about choosing a new direction. Feeling that the medical field was interesting, she chose the goal of becoming a nurse. After reviewing her transferable skills through guidance and counseling, she realized that working as a nurse would be too stressful on her body. At that time, Nowelle was referred for a vocational evaluation to further assess her strengths and abilities. The evaluation revealed Nowelle would be an excellent phlebotomist. Nowelle entered a training program that increased her knowledge and helped prepare her to work in the health field. Due to her arthritis, it became difficult for her to stand for longer periods of time. Because of this, Nowelle and her counselor decided an Assistive Technology Assessment would provide new resources to assist her performance on the job. Nowelle received AT devices which included the proper shoes and insoles. Nowelle was able to gain the confidence to continue on with the training program.

Upon completion of the training program, Nowelle was referred for Job Development and Placement Services. Nowelle was successfully placed when she obtained her "dream job" as a Patient Care Technician. This career allows Nowelle to use the medical knowledge gained through training, and she is able to sit and stand throughout the day which minimizes any physical stress on her body. Nowelle's new career is in an environment which offers her a salaried position at a local community health center with full benefits including health, dental, sick/vacation, retirement, and the possibility of advancement.



**Paul Fearn's - In his own words:**

**Client:** Paul Fearn's  
**Occupation:** Clerk  
**Employer:** The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
**Counselor:** Jane Cannata

I am writing this letter in response to a request from the Office of Rehabilitation Services Counselor Jane Cannata who asked me to send her my thoughts on the services that I received from her and the staff at RIDHS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

I first became involved with Jane in July of 2008 after being diagnosed with Optic Neuropathy of an unknown origin that caused me to be legally blind. Previous to my diagnosis I was self employed as a small machine shop owner. Because of my visual impairment I was forced to close my business and liquidate my assets. After closing the business there was a period of time where I had no direction or motivation as to what I was going to do in the future. I even rejected assistance once from Jane Cannata when she called me after she was notified of my condition from my Neuro Ophthalmologist Dr. Marjorie Murphy. Thanks to Jane's persuasion on her second call she was able to convince me to at least meet with her at her office to discuss my plans for the future and the many services they had to offer.

When I finally met with Jane she was able to convince me that with proper adaptive equipment and training and rehabilitation, I could become actively employed again. After the meeting I was excited and hopeful but admittedly a little doubtful.

At our second meeting I was evaluated and was made aware of all the benefits available to me through the ADA such as transportation and Ticket to Work Program and many other programs available that I was unaware of.

I was introduced to Jeanne Fay, my WIPA coordinator. Many thanks to Jeanne for her patients and help at meetings and phone calls with her. Within weeks I was introduced to Stephen DeTatto from Silver Lining Technologies who outfitted me with a new Dell PC that was equipped with "Magic" screen magnification software with speech. Also I was given a "Sapphire" Portable Video Magnifier along with a large screen video magnifier which I greatly appreciate that allows me to read almost anything from mail, books, newspapers and much more. Thanks to Stephen for his time he spent in installing the computer and teaching me how to use the magic program and all the other assistive equipment. I'm also grateful to Graciela Pires who came to my home on two occasions to show me how to make my home more functional and to install a "Talking Typing Teacher" and teaching me how to use it. Without Graciela's assistance I probably would not have been able to.



Soon after, Jane Cannata arranged for me to meet with some of the staff at Insight in Warwick, where I was given an eye exam and evaluation from Dr. Bradley who prescribed other assistive tools such as a handheld optical magnifier and TV glasses. At this point in my rehab Jane recognized the need for a more hands-on approach so she referred me to Denise Doktor at Goodwill Industries where I was

once again evaluated and placed into a work-based program called E-Waste. With the help of Ed Balasco I was taught how to disassemble computers and other electronic devices to reclaim valuable components and recycle semi-precious metals and plastics. To me this was a huge step in my rehabilitation because it regained my confidence in myself.

Part of the Goodwill program was job placement which was very helpful in placing me back into the work force. In the two years after completion of the E-Waste program I went on to being employed at two entirely different jobs that neither worked out. I learned that the hardest part of my rehabilitation was finding what I was comfortable doing. In my third attempt at employment, thanks to Melanie Sbardella and Rebecca Cloutier, I was hired by The Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to work at their office supply store in Newport, RI as a clerk. I have been employed since July 2012. So far it's been working out great. I think I found a job that I enjoy and do a good job at.

All of this would not have been possible if not for Jane Cannata and the staff at RIDHS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired who believed in me and supported me throughout my rehabilitation process. For that I will be eternally grateful.

Thank you all.

## Standard 1 Employment Outcomes

Indicator	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
1.1 - Number of Employment Outcomes - Federal Standard Equal to or greater than prior	5 greater	6 greater	188 less	159 greater	116 less	1 greater
Indicator 1.2 - The percentage of individuals who exited the VR Program after receiving services who achieved an employment outcome. (Federal Standard -	62.81%	62.79%	40.72%	60.18%	28.80%	58.90%
Indicator 1.3 - The percentage of individuals who achieved an employment outcome and are earning at least the minimum wage. (Federal Standard - 72.6%)	95.73%	96.30%	97.89%	97.52%	99.20%	99.80%
Indicator 1.4 -Competitively Employed (minimum wage or higher) who have a Significant Disability Federal Standard - 62.40%	100%	100%	100%	98.31%	98.80%	100%
Indicator 1.5 -Earnings Ratio of Minimum Wage or higher for ORS vs. State Average Federal Standard - Ratio of .52	.520	.510	.540	.500	.500	.500
Indicator 1.6 - Self-Support (report own income at closure vs. own income at application) Federal Standard 53% mathematical difference	55.43%	54.40%	62.95%	67.28%	70.10%	64.10%
<b>Standard 2 Minority Ratio Equal Access to Services</b> Federal Standard Ratio of .80 for n=100+	.884	.847	.890	.910	.730	.840

**Standards and Performance Indicators as of 9/30/13**

The 6th Annual Vocational Rehabilitation Program Evaluation & Quality Assurance Summit was held in Rhode Island on September 16 and 17, 2013. ORS was proud to be a part of sponsoring this year's Summit, which approximately 200 people from all over the United States attended. This year provided new ideas from across the vocational rehabilitation field and offered opportunities to:

- Learn about promising practices from recognized experts in program evaluation and quality assurance;
- Share experiences, strategies, and tools with like-minded professionals; and to
- Find support to continue improving employment service and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

On Monday, September 16, Summit Keynote Speaker David Wittenburg addressed the topic of barriers and facilitators to developing evidence on the efficacy of employment interventions, and provided an overview of some of the key ingredients needed to develop effective interventions that could be convincing to skeptics. Focusing on the three general concepts of creativity, measurement, and messaging, Wittenburg discussed how these key ingredients used in harmony can convince skeptical audiences and help to spread promising practices. David Wittenburg is a senior researcher in the Center for Studying Disability Policy and an associate director in the health division at Mathematica Policy Research. He has directed projects that examine interventions to promote employment among people with disabilities. He has published reports, journal articles, and policy briefs for the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Department of Education on employment initiatives for people with disabilities and has a specific interest in interventions for transition-age youth.

On Tuesday, September 17, Keynote Speaker Steve Dickenson addressed what, why, and how excellence is achieved in the real world. He talked about how management can propel excellence by refining formal practices, linking measurements to customer needs, and "just do it" actions.

In addition to the Keynote Speakers, there were several concurrent sessions going on throughout the day. They included such topics as: Business Intelligence in Vocational Rehabilitation; Changing Business Practices for Client Engagement; Data Driven Management: Virginia's Experience; Data Efficiency in Effective Communication; Creativity, Measurement & Messaging: Moving Towards Stronger Practices; Electronic Case Reviews and Consumer Surveys; Ethical Data: Looking at What It Is and How We Use It; Evaluating Intended Continuing Education Outcomes; ExploreVR: A Free, Open, Accessible VR Data Portal; Methodologies to Conduct a Needs Assessment; Moving from Pilot Project to System Integration; People, Tools & Processes: The Secrets to Excellence in Service; and Promising and Emerging Practices for Youth. The Summit concluded with the panel of VR Directors.

## Raymond A. Carroll Award

The Raymond A. Carroll Award is given to an individual who exemplifies the same dedication in serving individuals with disabilities as Mr. Carroll had during his forty-two years of state service.

Raymond Carroll began his career at the Office of Rehabilitation Services in 1966 and retired in 2008. During that time, he demonstrated his awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities and was a dedicated and effective advocate for improving the standards set for programs providing services for those individuals with disabilities.

On Friday, December 20, 2013, Sherry Olink was extremely surprised when she was presented with the 3rd Annual Raymond A. Carroll Award at this year's Annual Strategic Planning day. Sherry has worked at ORS since November, 1986, where she began her career as a Senior Clerk Stenographer. Today she works in the Fiscal Department as a Junior Resource Specialist. Sherry has a tremendous value to the organization not only for her vast knowledge of the work she performs, but also for the huge volume of issues she addresses throughout her work time. Sherry is one of those key personnel who allows counselors, supervisors, and administrators the ability to do their jobs. Sherry is a valuable member of the ORS rehabilitation team, and a worthy recipient of this award.



Past Recipients:  
Sharon DiPinto (2011) & Kathleen McCabe (2012)  
with Sherry Olink

**The State Rehabilitation Council** is a citizen advisory body appointed by the Governor. The Council is consumer-controlled in that a majority of its members are individuals with disabilities and not employed by the State VR Agency. Members represent agencies, organizations and other councils of and for individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island. The SRC in conjunction with the VR agency jointly conduct the comprehensive statewide needs assessment of individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island, develop and agree to the state's annual goals and priorities in carrying out the VR program, annually evaluate the state's performance relative to its goals, and conducts customer satisfaction surveys. Together the SRC and the state VR agency partner to assure that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate, timely, and effective VR services.

**The Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired** is an advisory council appointed by the Governor that advises the SBVI regarding the programs provided by that agency; works collaboratively with the State Rehabilitation Council and the Statewide Independent Living Council; and provides oversight responsibility to the Independent Living Program for the Elderly Blind.

**The RI Council on Assistive Technology (RICAT)** is the advisory body to the RI Assistive Technology program - Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) which is funded through the AT Act. RICAT is actively involved in legislative and other initiatives to increase access to assistive technology for Rhode Islanders.

**The RI Statewide Independent Living Council (RISILC)** jointly develops and submits, in conjunction with the ORS, the State Plan for Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living. They also monitor, review, and evaluate the implementation of the State Plan.

**The State Committee of Blind Vendors** is composed of representatives elected from among all licensed blind vendors within the state. The Committee participates actively in carrying out all of the program management responsibilities.



## ***The Mission of the Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services is***

“To empower individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and integration into society.”



### ***Values***

We value the worth, dignity, rights, responsibilities, and empowerment of all persons with disabilities in achieving their individualized goals.

We value staff who reflect pride and commitment to excellence in achieving our mission.

We value a management style that fosters responsibility and accountability while encouraging creativity, initiative, and leadership throughout the organization.

We value community support in achieving the agency's mission.

We value leadership which promotes clarity of purpose.

DHS does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, religion or sex in acceptance for or provision of services, employment or treatment in its educational and other programs and activities.

For further information about this policy, contact:  
the Community Relations Liaison Office, 401.462.2130  
or TDD (hearing impaired) 401.462.6239.



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***“Helping individuals with disabilities to  
choose, find and keep employment”***

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